

FYSM 1004C: Stories of the Self: Literature that Matters & Writing that Works

Focusing on literature written in English from the early twentieth century to the present, we will explore the many ways that writers tell stories of “the self” in particular cultural contexts. Developing strategies for analyzing, enjoying, and understanding literature, we will examine how literary texts engage with historical, political, and cultural concerns of human experience, including gender, sexuality, racialization, systemic white supremacy, colonialism, slavery and its legacies, war, psychiatry, trauma, historical memory, and more. Examining different literary genres and forms, we will consider how writers have drawn upon and transformed the formal qualities of these genres to write stories of the self that are simultaneously intimately personal, culturally meaningful, and socially powerful. We will compare, contrast, and debate authors, literary movements, and issues across histories and cultures to forge productive conversations about how and why literature mattered in the past and matters to us now. A variety of topics and approaches will encourage engaging discussions: Identity Matters?: Poetry, the Poet, and Questions of the Self; Letters and Legacies: The Harlem Renaissance to Now; Writing and Remembering Historical Trauma: Representing the Great War; “An ordinary mind on an ordinary day”: Modern Fiction and the Narration of Consciousness; and Being and Belonging in Turtle Island/Canada. Culturally and geographically, we will focus on literatures from Ireland, England, Canada and the US, by authors with a range of lived experiences.

Class time will be dedicated to sharing, exploring, and learning from our responses to the literature; developing skills in analysis, close reading, critical thinking, and self-reflection; acquiring a vocabulary of terms for literary analysis; developing research skills; considering the historical, social, and intellectual contexts in which the literary works were produced while reflecting on their relevance now; developing strategies for effective writing; honing your own writing voice; and self-reflecting on processes of reading and writing. These practices will help you read, think, and write more effectively about anything. The seminar emphasizes class discussion and peer learning, student participation, regular writing and reflection, and the value and pleasures of learning in community.

Authors will (mostly likely) include Thomas King, Sylvia Plath, Audre Lorde, James Baldwin, W.B Yeats, T.S. Eliot, Langston Hughes, Nella Larsen, Ta-Nehisi Coates, David Chariandy, Tomson Highway, great war poets (poets of WWI), Virginia Woolf, and Pat Barker.



Image credits:

Nella Larsen: public domain

Sylvia Plath: Public Domain

Tomson Highway: Canadian Encyclopedia https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/highway-tomson?gclid=Cj0KCQjw0PWRBhDKARIsAPKHFGi2Faydp5uT-q39YwOcl3_9gWWx8G-pb0Z3EsFqj8OyUFpA7Gs-gKQaAuBaEALw_wcB

Ta-Nehisi Coates and son: *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/sep/20/ta-nehisi-coates-between-the-world-and-me-extract>